

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

June 8, 2026, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm conducted remotely via Zoom

Attendees, Drought Management Task Force Members:

Vandana Rao, Co-Chair, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
Benjamin Hiltunen, Co-Chair, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
Duane LeVangie, Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Water Management Act
Jen Pederson, Massachusetts Water Works Association (MWWA)
Lydia Olson, Massachusetts Rivers Alliance (MRA)
Viki Zoltay, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Office of Water Resources (OWR)
Anne Carroll, DCR OWR
Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health (DPH)
Francis Tarasiewicz, NOAA – National Weather Service (NWS)
Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
John Gregoire, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Michael Botelho, Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)
Brian Loving, United States Geological Survey (USGS)
Kate Bentsen, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Division of Ecological Restoration
Adam Kautza, DFG, MassWildlife
Thomas Maguire, MassDEP, Wetlands Program
Caulin Lauzon, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Marcus Pareto, Department of Public Utilities (DPU)

Other Attendees:

Aisha Revolus	EEA	John Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District
Alan Jacobs	Bluestar Ink	John Jensen	City of Worcester
Alex Taylor	DPU	John Scannell	DCR
Alexandra Lee	EEA/DCR Intern	Justine Kent-Uritam	Dover Open Space Committee
Allyssa Lane	Dedham-Westwood Water District	Keira Rice	Wellesley Water & Sewer Department
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR	Matt Comeau	Lynn Water & Sewer Commission
Benjamin Chan	Town of Wellesley	Matt Lanen	Falmouth Water Department
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Matthew Prince	North Reading Water Superintendent
Caitlin LeDuc	Town of Natick	Michael Blanchard	Town of Dover
Colin Stokes	Groveland Water	Michael Souza	MEMA Meteorologist
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NDIS	Mike Retzky	Town of Needham
Dan Gage	Town of Duxbury	Paul Brinkman	Pepperell DPW
Dee-Ann Crozier	USGS	Pine duBois	Jones River Watershed Association
Demetrios Vidalis	Town of Wellesley	Purvi Patel	EEA
Don Cooper	Medway Water	Rob Faley	Chatham DPW
Drew Foley	MWRA	Robert Worthley	Town of Foxborough
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Russ Makiej	Town of Burlington
Emily Maynard	City of Worcester	Sara Abduljawad	Charles River Watershed Association
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	Sara Cohen	DCR OWR
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	Steve Cusick	Needham Water Department

Grace Manning	EEA/DCR Intern	Tim Pasakarnis	Cape Cod Commission
Heather Stayton	Westfield Water	Tom Trainor	Sherborn Groundwater Protection Commission
Jason Duff	DCR OWR	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Jimmy Powell	Jones River Watershed Association	William Bercume-Brisbois	Needham DPW

1. Introduction

Rao called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. and thanked everyone for attending. She asked attendees to enter their names and affiliations in the chat and reminded them that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of meeting notes. She introduced herself and co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen. Rao and Hiltunen thanked everyone for their commitment to the Drought Management Task Force and the extended drought period we have been dealing with. Rao called for the approval of the May 7 and May 21 Task Force meeting notes. For the May 7 meeting a motion was made by Pederson and seconded by LeVangie; for the May 21 meeting a motion was made by Pederson and seconded by Zoltay. Both meeting notes were approved with minor corrections.

2. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

Weather & Forecast: Francis Tarasiewicz – NOAA National Weather Service and Northeast River Forecasting Center

The past month brought 1 to 3 inches of total precipitation across the Commonwealth, with 3 to 4 inches in central Worcester County and portions of Essex County. Outside of these localized areas, the state tracked a deficit of 0.5 to 1.5 inches below normal, with central Worcester County being the exception at 0.5 to 1 inch above normal. Over the last 3-months timeframe, precipitation spread ranged between 50% and 100% of normal, dropping to 50% to 75% across eastern Massachusetts, the Berkshires, and the Islands. Over the last 6 months most of the state was tracking at 75% to 85% of normal, though the Berkshires and northeastern Massachusetts lagged significantly at 50% to 75% of the normal precipitation. The seven-day forecast projected limited, isolated rainfall totaling 0.1 to 0.5 inches statewide, driven by summer convection and thunderstorms. The 6-to-10 day and two-week outlook lean toward above-normal precipitation (33% to 40% chance) alongside a strong signal for above-normal temperatures. The 3-month outlook maintains this extended trend, showing a weak tendency toward above-normal precipitation and a 33% to 40% chance of above-normal temperatures across the Northeast.

Hydrologic: Brian Loving – USGS

Streamflow conditions statewide are tracking below the 50th percentile across the Commonwealth. Conditions are slightly better in the western part of Massachusetts compared to the drier eastern region, though strong exceptions exist in both areas. Stations designated as normal (the 25th to 75th percentile range), such as the Hoosick River at Adams, are hovering at the very low end of normal, close to the 25th percentile. Moving east, the North Nashua River at Fitchburg tracks just below normal. The northeast has experienced extremely dry conditions since the February snowmelt. In the southeast, the Taunton River remained entirely below the normal range, lingering in the 10th to 25th percentile for the whole month of May. Overall, May streamflow concluded at the very low end of normal or below normal, with several stations establishing new record lows for the month. Groundwater conditions mirror surface water

trends, exhibiting even patchier conditions. While the western half of the state remains marginally wetter than the east, adjacent wells within the same climate regions, most notably on the Cape, diverge greatly, with some wells holding in the normal range while neighboring sites register near-record lows. Overall, there was not a clear pattern with groundwater because there were below normal and around normal wells in many regions.

Water Supply: Duane LeVangie – MassDEP

LeVangie summarized MassDEP's ongoing outdoor water restriction frameworks, emphasizing that restrictions written into public water supply and golf permits vary as they have evolved over time. Permits issued tie restrictions to streamflow triggers using the June Aquatic Base Flow (ABF) value for May and June, shifting to the August ABF value from July through September, with a 7-day low flow trigger further restricting use down to one day per week. Groundwater elevation triggers substitute streamflows on the Cape, Islands, and parts southeastern Massachusetts. Systems choose between a fixed calendar approach or real-time streamflow tracking, with suppliers meeting the 65 RGPCD standard having more flexibility. Restrictions for registered-only systems, conditioned in April 2023, align directly with Task Force drought declarations: Level 1 requires limiting watering to one day per week outside the hours of 9 to 5, Level 2 bans non-essential outdoor use with specified exceptions, and Level 3 enforces a total ban on outdoor water use. Golf courses face escalating irrigation cuts on fairways and roughs as drought statuses worsen, stepping down to 60% at Level 2 and 40% at Level 3 with a complete rough irrigation ban.

Reflecting changes from May 5th to June 5th, 28 stream gauges fell below ABF triggers for three consecutive days, four groundwater wells triggered, and no 7-day low flow triggers have been met. Statewide, 130 public water systems are implementing restrictions: 5 voluntary and 125 mandatory. Of the mandatory systems, 62 limit watering to 1 day or less and 63 limit it to 2 days or more, reflecting differing system flexibilities. LeVangie clarified that while 65 registered-only systems adhere strictly to Task Force recommendations, permitted systems with overlapping registration conditions are driven primarily by their permit terms, though any system may voluntarily implement more restrictive measures. The updated June 1st restriction map tracks these variations alongside 3 active emergency declarations in Wayland, Milford, and Bridgewater. MassDEP is currently conducting targeted outreach to ensure compliance with mandated restrictions.

Water Supply: John Gregoire – MWRA

Gregoire provided the MWRA update, noting that the Quabbin Reservoir is solidly below normal seasonal operations at 83.4% capacity and approximately 8 feet below the lower spillway, having dropped about half a foot in elevation since the last meeting. The seasonal transfer of water from Quabbin to Wachusett remains active from mid-May through October to manage organic matter content and support increased supply demands during peak summer months. Due to these ongoing transfers, the Wachusett Reservoir level is currently tracking slightly above its top operating band, though it is expected to level off and return to normal bands as seasonal water demand increases with forecasted above-average temperatures. May precipitation for the watersheds aligned closely with long-term averages. The Sudbury and Foss emergency source reservoirs sit right in the middle of their normal operating bands with no significant operational changes. Rao acknowledged Gregoire's upcoming retirement in July, thanking him on behalf of the Commonwealth and the Secretary for his long-standing service with the Task Force.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

Pederson summarized recent reports from municipal water systems, noting that surface water systems are generally performing well. Springfield and Leominster report reservoirs at 97% and 95% capacity respectively, while Lynn Water and Sewer stands at 71.3% capacity against a normal baseline of 84.8%, a variance that will be monitored through the summer months but is not currently a major concern. Edgartown reported no issues, but noted standing water remaining in local ponds and has pumped 4 million gallons less this year than in previous years, which comes with minor revenue impacts.

Private Water Supply: Marcos Pareto – DPU

Pareto updated the Task Force on Aquarion private water systems, noting that Millbury and Oxford are operating under Level 2 drought conditions, which enforce a ban on all non-essential outdoor water usage. Dover and Sheffield systems are at Level 1, restricting outdoor water use to one day per week, while Pine Hills limits usage to two days per week. Pederson and LeVangie clarified that individual permit requirements dictate these specific limits, and a two-day restriction may be well within their legal permit conditions. Rao suggested coordinating offline with Pareto regarding potential outreach if conditions deteriorate further on the South Shore.

Wetlands: Tom Maguire – DEP

Maguire reported that MassDEP regions have not been contacted by local conservation commissions regarding drought conditions during the month of May.

Fish and Game: Kate Bentsen – DER; Adam Kautza – DFG

Bentsen shared that active wetland restoration sites are faring better and buffering drought impacts despite drying conditions, particularly across cranberry bog restoration locations in the Southeast, Cape, and Islands.

Kautza reported that field activities are currently in an in between time following trout stocking and ahead of upcoming summer stream surveys. Anecdotally, his field observations on Sucker Brook in Pepperell indicated low water levels, though they note the stream is beaver dominated, so it is difficult to tell how exactly how low it actually is.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

Olson reported that streamflows are generally tracking lower than normal across the state. Specific reports indicating reduced flows were received from the Hoosick River Watershed Association in the northwest, the Charles River watershed in the northeast, and the Taunton River watershed, alongside ongoing low flow conditions on the Jones River.

Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee: Moussa Siri

Siri presented photos from visits to six observation sites, demonstrating a decrease in water and flow levels across all locations compared to previous observations. Visual documentation of the monitored streams showed newly exposed structural cracks and rocks indicative of low flow. At the Atherton Brook crossing on Route 202, Siri noted that active flow had decreased enough to only leave the area damp. At the northern end of the Quabbin Reservoir, a visible retreat of water exposed substantial boulders. Minor flow decreases were also visually recorded at the Swift River East Branch. Finally, observations at the Connecticut River revealed a lower water line and exposed rocks; however, Siri noted that interpreting

these specific levels remains difficult due to the Turners Falls Dam upstream being open or closed at different times.

Agricultural: Michael Botelho – DAR

Botelho reported some localized agricultural issues due to late frosts and some localized heavy rain on strawberry crops, but outside of that, no drought-related reports.

Fire Danger – DCR

Not present at meeting.

Engineering: John Scannell – DCR

No reports.

Public Health: Dalene LaPointe – DPH

No reports.

3. Presentation of Index Severity Levels per MA DMP

Zoltay reviewed the six monitored indices, detailing how monthly data from reporting stations are utilized to calculate individual station percentile values relative to full historical records to determine index severity designations. Zoltay highlighted slight map variances between the state's 30th-percentile as the start for below-normal conditions and the U.S. Geological Survey's 25th-percentile for marking the same, noting that as a result some areas marked green by the USGS may register as Level 1 under state standards. In evaluating regional conditions, she noted the state is divided into seven major drought regions and multiple major basin boundaries to allow for localized drought evaluations.

Reviewing the drought's progression since its mid-August onset, Zoltay noted that conditions have remained highly variable; following a snowmelt event and normal precipitation that drove significant recovery in March, subsequent fluctuations and variable rainfall led to expanded deficits, culminating in an expansion of D2 (MA Level 3) conditions on the late May U.S. Drought Monitor map alongside record-low streamflows in the Northeast during May. Look-back periods for the precipitation index were selected based on the start of regional drought durations, tracking a 3-month period for the West and Southeast, a 12-month period for the Connecticut River Valley, Central, and Northeast Regions, and a year and a half period for the Cape and Islands. Evapotranspiration has not been a primary driver. All regional streamflow medians remain elevated, with the Northeast and Southeast tracking at index severity level (ISL) 3. Groundwater monitoring wells mirrored this degradation with many at level 2, some at level 3, and one at level 4. Quite a few regional medians dropped down into level 2 status and the Southeast dropped to the 23rd percentile or ISL 1. KBDI remained within the normal range for all areas except the Northeast, which registered a slightly elevated ISL 1 status. Responding to a question from Pederson, Zoltay clarified that the KBDI calculation is unique because it is traditionally determined using the highest recorded value within a region rather than the median.

For lakes and impoundments, the index registered record-low regional percentiles across the eastern half of the state. The actual storage capacity of the six reporting Northeast reservoirs ranged from 56% to 97% full. Pederson, Rao, and Carroll emphasized that the index is a comparative measurement against historical data and must not be misinterpreted by the public as an indicator of limited water supply

availability, as these specific systems are deliberately operated to remain as close to 100% capacity as possible. Responding to Maguire's question, Zoltay and Rao verified that these metrics represent the percent of water volume relative to full rather than a percentage of "normal" or average percent full.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region include comments

Western, Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) and Central – Rao addressed the Western, Connecticut River Valley, and Central regions together, noting that despite minor regional indicator deterioration, the underlying indices stayed similar to the prior month and the staff recommendation was to hold these Regions at their current drought levels. Comparing May metrics against April revealed a deterioration in precipitation values and consistent stress on groundwater aquifers, though localized mid-month rain showers provided temporary, minor stabilization to streamflows. In the Western region specifically, groundwater metrics recorded slight improvements but remained at the edge of the drought threshold. All Task Force members agreed to hold the Western Region at Level 1 – Mild Drought, the Connecticut River Valley at Level 2 – Significant Drought, and the Central Region at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Northeast – Rao introduced the Northeast region, where indices continue to track at an elevated regional scale. Looking back since April, data indicated a rise of precipitation deficits, which counteracted minor, localized improvements in other indices. Maguire noted for the record that May streamflows remain below normal. In the chat Pederson noted communication challenges in switching levels too soon. All Task Force members favored maintaining the current status and to hold the Northeast Region at Level 3 – Critical Drought.

Southeast – Regional conditions significantly declined in the Southeast Region, with the precipitation index falling to the 31st percentile and lakes and impoundments persisting at ISL 3. Rao noted that streamflow conditions worsened as well. Pederson pushed to hold the region at Level 1, highlighting that the lakes and impoundments index may be skewed by having only a single data point (as confirmed by Graham) and reiterating that water systems face operational challenges when forced to switch restrictions from month to month. Rao mentioned that the cumulative data and steep groundwater declines justified stronger action. All Task Force members agreed to move the Southeast Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought, except for one vote for holding at Level 1 for another month.

Cape Cod – Cape Cod's groundwater fell from the 22nd to the 18th percentile, streamflow dropped to the 21st percentile to sit right at the border of ISL 2, and the Region's single lakes and impoundments monitoring station showed continued decline. All Task Force members agreed to move Cape Cod to Level 2 – Significant Drought, except for one vote to hold at Level 1 for another month.

Islands – Zoltay presented the Islands data, reporting that the difference in drought conditions between the two counties had narrowed due to a steep 10-point drop in Dukes County groundwater down to the 19th percentile, while Nantucket regressed further from the 17th to the 12th percentile. Staff recommended merging the county assessments to align with the unified Islands drought Region rather than maintaining separate county-level designations. The staff recommendation was to move the Islands Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought. Pederson requested keeping Dukes County at Level 1 while moving Nantucket to Level 2, citing a lack of visible localized impacts from a water supply perspective in Edgartown. Rao noted the sheer magnitude of the groundwater drop. Maguire noted that groundwater recharge is improbable without above-normal precipitation and cooler temperatures, while Rao added

that seasonal leaf-out and heavy vegetative transpiration would absorb minor rainfall before it could penetrate the aquifers.

Pederson requested including a link in the meeting summary regarding [Orleans' water restriction issues](#) to illustrate the difficulty stricter mandates cause and the community pushback. She noted her members face pressure to allow watering, emphasizing the need for communication with local leaders, and inquired about drought outreach to the state legislature. Rao agreed on the need to educate all levels of government to ease local pressure, noting EEA reached out to Northeast legislators when that Region hit Level 3 with two indices at ISL 4, and stated staff will plan further legislative outreach following the next drought alert declaration.

Pasakarnis echoed Pederson's comments, noting Cape Cod groundwater systems face public anxiety regarding aquifer depletion and housing development. They highlighted the difficulty of communicating that conservation is necessary to protect surface water, even though systems are not running out of supply. Pasakarnis noted town restrictions and competing irrigation demands further complicate this nuanced messaging, but stated the Cape Cod Commission will continue sharing materials with local districts. Rao appreciated the feedback on local-level challenges. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to have one declaration for the Islands Region at Level 2 – Significant Drought, except for one vote to hold Dukes at Level 1 and Nantucket at Level 2.

Summary of Recommendations:

Southeast: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Northeast: Level 3 – Critical Drought

CTRV: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Central: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Western: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Cape Cod: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Islands: Level 2 – Significant Drought

6. Recommendations for Drought Level Response Actions

Rao summarized the recommendations for drought levels that had been discussed throughout the meeting. The press release and other communications should come out in the next few business days.

7. Next Steps

Regarding additional outreach, Rao requested staff share the [MassWaters instagram link](#), encouraging organizations and towns to amplify the drought messaging, videos, and resource topics published there. Rao requested feedback on useful information types or formats for local water users and noted that the online drought FAQ webpage is continuously updated, inviting further question submissions. Finally, in response to an inquiry from Bentsen, Rao stated that the July and August meeting schedules will be finalized and invitations sent within the next day, while allowing necessary time for post-month data collection and processing. Pederson emphasized that municipal officials should be contacted the week before a drought declaration, given top-down local structures, and requested that water suppliers be included in these invitations. Rao agreed, confirming wide distribution via MEMA and MassDEP mailing lists. Pederson also questioned when the drought plan would be updated, noting the current drought has lasted two years with no immediate end. Rao acknowledged the past practice of waiting until a drought

ends but stated that interagency technical staff have begun evaluating the Lakes and Impoundments Index, and the Task Force will eventually make a combined decision on whether to implement changes mid-drought.

Hiltunen reported on a coordination meeting with DCR Fire and the Department of Fire Services regarding an action item to gather water availability data from rural fire chiefs who rely on drafting sites. Rather than using standard digital surveys, Chief Celino volunteered DCR District Fire Wardens to leverage existing relationships and collect the data directly during regular meetings. The data collection will track the total number of drafting sites and how many remain viable due to sufficient water levels, providing a qualitative early warning system to help mobilize local community assistance if fire danger escalates. As immediate next steps, Hiltunen is drafting a heads-up communication for local chiefs to preview the upcoming outreach, which will target Worcester County westward while including targeted water-reliant communities in eastern Massachusetts. Rao and Zoltay emphasized keeping the inquiry simple to maximize response clarity, with Rao noting the data collection should become a recurring feedback loop.

The recommendations will be shared with the Secretary of EEA for a final decision on updated drought declarations. Social media outreach will be coordinated via the [MassWaters Instagram](#) page. Task Force members are encouraged to share and amplify drought messaging. The Task Force will meet again in early July.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 12:50 pm.